CHAPTER 1
THE GIRLS' OWN PAPER AND SOCIAL WELFARE (1880–1908)

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DURING THE nineteenth century, the slums and poverty which emerged in the rapidly growing urban and industrial areas of Britain created social problems and tensions which were historically unprecedented. The response of the liberal state codified in the New Poor Law of 1838 was woefully inadequate to the extent and nature of the need and voluntary work undertaken by religious institutions and concerned philanthropists became increasingly important in the provision of relief outside the workhouse. As the century progressed, such voluntary work became increasingly identified by middle-class women as a means whereby they could gain access to work outside the home and by the end of the century, work in the slums, district visiting and parish work had become a highly fashionable activity for young women of the upper and middle classes.

Some of the young women who devoted time and energy remained dedicated to this work throughout their lives. Henrietta Barnett (1854–1936), Margaret McMillan (1860–1932), and Lily Montagu (1873–1963) are among the outstanding examples of those who followed in the footsteps of pioneers such as the redoubtable Octavia Hill (1838–1912) in giving a life-long commitment. For others, such as Margaret Macdonald, Emmeline Pethwick, Charlotte Despard, Sylvia Pankhurst and Beatrice Webb, voluntary work was either an aspect of, or served as an apprenticeship for, their political activity. The names of these women are familiar today, but their fame was seldom earned as a direct consequence of their involvement in what was then loosely identified as 'social work'. Sylvia Pankhurst and Emmeline Pethwick (Lawrence), for instance, are mainly remembered for the part they played in the Women's Suffrage Movement; Charlotte Despard for her commitment to Irish Republicanism; and Beatrice Webb for her Fabianism

and her involvement in the creation of the Labour Party. Lily Montagu, who worked with the London Jewish community and throughout her long life retained a deep commitment to community and youth work, is mostly remembered because of her religious activism (Spence, 1998). Sometimes it is possible to retrieve an almost-forgotten name such as that of Flora Freeman, but only because they might have left a written account of their efforts such as in her simply written little book, *Religious and Social Work Amongst Girls*, (Freeman, 1904). Unlike her, most of those young women who dedicated so much time and energy to work for the poor in some form or another are entirely forgotten. They have left barely a trace of their motivations, methods and activities.

Alerted by the work of feminist historians whose research has uncovered some of the detail of the public service contribution of women in the nineteenth century (Vicinus, 1985; Walkowitz, 1996), welfare historians have increasingly worked to re-trace the influence of women whose memory has been obscured in the shadow of more famous individuals. For instance, it has been suggested that the little known friend of Henrietta Barnett, Marion Paterson made an important contribution to the Toynbee Hall Settlement (Blair, 2001; Barnett, 1918, 104–5), though it is mainly Henrietta's husband Samuel who is remembered. Interpretation of historical records from a feminist perspective has led to different emphases in historical analysis. For example, women's relationships with each other are being increasingly recognised as constituting an independent network of influence before the First World War and the changed nature of these relationships seems to be implicated in the loss of vigour in some welfare organisations, such as the London Settlements and the Girls' Club Movement after that war (Vicinus, 1985; Batsleer 2001; Blair, 2001). Such research is important in gaining a fuller understanding of the historical development of social and community services, but nevertheless, the contribution of the majority remains unrecorded.

Yet it is these forgotten women who provided much of the labour which enabled social welfare work to become a significant force in shaping the political and practical response to poverty throughout the twentieth century. It was often their beliefs, enthusiasms, and prejudices which set the terms within which the relationship between organisation and locality, between 'worker' and 'client' were realised. Welfare initiatives which were aimed directly at women and children in particular depended, sometimes entirely, upon ordinary middle-class female volunteers to undertake the face-to-face work. The evidence which these volunteers drew from their interventions also informed the development of organisational and political party policy, for despite their exclusion from the franchise, middle-class women of all ages had access to public influence, both in their own right and through their relationships with men. They were not only face-to-face workers, but also exercised power within the institutional infrastructure of local communities sitting on the committees which guided practice and provided the evidence that informed government and organisational policy. Well connected women used their positions systematically to instigate welfare reforms in national policy and the models which these 'ladies of influence' (Williams, 2000) devised to exert power were repeated on a smaller scale in local communities and organisations. In this way an infrastructure of social welfare work was shaped by anonymous, everyday middle-class female activity which was so everyday as to be virtually unworthy of remark. The lives of the most significant and personally well connected individuals were but a part of this.

Female welfare activism in the latter years of the nineteenth century was crucial to the creation of what was eventually to become the set of related professions of social work, community work and youth work. Yet the centrality of ordinary women in the generation of work supportive of association, education and collective organisation which are at the core of community and youth work was gradually overshadowed throughout the twentieth century as the accounts of such work focused upon important male figures or upon the founders of male organisations (Barnett, 1918; Eager, 1953; Dawes, 1975). Meanwhile, women became increasingly identified with the more narrowly conceived profession of social work with an emphasis upon family welfare and individual therapeutic interventions (Woodroofe, 1962).

The explanations for the stereotyping of the female role as particular to the history of modern social work rather than to community and youth work are complex (Spence, 2001) and to some extent this reflects the reality of women choosing to become professional, paid social workers rather than voluntary community activists and club workers. However, the predisposition of women towards such a choice is indicative of the circumstances within which they had always pursued their welfare activism which for most, was tolerated only insofar as it did not conflict with their family duties or conservative ideas about femininity (Parker, 1988; Vicinus, 1985). Traditional restraints shaped their claim to the range of opportunities offered by social welfare work and their very success within these boundaries reinforced conservative conceptualisations about which aspects of the work were particularly fitting for women's attention.

Some of those who achieved pre-eminence in the work did so like Lily Montagu, at the expense of family harmony (Montagu, 1913), but it is probable that the majority of volunteers simply attempted to undertake their welfare work within the confines of their traditional role. Whatever the individual tensions facing young women who wished to participate in voluntary work with the poor, they all had access to the general advice and guidance provided by the women's magazines which flourished in this period. These magazines, designed for a mass market, offered a diet of fiction, reportage, factual information, practical instruction and advice designed to appeal to the interests and enthusiasms of the widest possible constituency of female readers (Reynolds, 1990). Foremost amongst them was the weekly Girls' Own Paper (GOP) which described a wide range of voluntary social work opportunities with the intention of giving the reader the 'best advice' about how and in what terms she might participate in such activity. From this magazine it is possible to delineate some key principles within which social welfare work was framed for women. These principles were much more congruent with the individual and family based interventions characteristic of social work than with the associative and educative interventions characteristic of community and youth work.

THE GIRLS' OWN PAPER

The *Girls' Own Paper* which made its debut in 1880, was one of numerous publications which appeared in the wake of technical developments in printing in the latter years of the nineteenth century and which served a newly literate population hungry for reading material. By 1884 the *GOP* was 'reputed to have achieved the highest circulation of any

English illustrated magazine' (Reynolds, 1990, xviii). It purported to be directed at all girls whatever their class and status, universalising the idea of 'girlhood'. Looking back in the 1,000th number, the editor, Charles Peters, explained his original intentions:

> *It appeared to him that there was a real want of a paper which girls could truly call their own: a paper which would be to the whole sisterhood a sensible, interesting and good-humoured companion, counsellor and friend, advocating their best interests, taking part in everything affecting them, giving them the best advice, conveying to them the best information, supplying them with the most readable fiction, and trying to exercise over them a refining and elevating influence.* (Vol. XX, 1899–1900, 345)

At the cost of one penny a week, the *GOP* could have been purchased by all but the very poorest girls. However, its tone, style and content suggest an expectation of a mainly middle-class readership. Within its pages, written by genteel and sometimes aristocratic authors, it was assumed that the reader knew little about working-class life and people who are invariably portrayed as 'the other':

> *The average factory girl is honest, industrious, independent and generous, but she is very poor; she has little money to spend on good food; she has nowhere to eat her dinner but a public house, or in the streets, and she is rough and ignorant, and hardly knows how to mend her clothes or cook a dinner.* (Vol. 26, 1905, 324)

To enjoy the *GOP* in its entirety, readers would at least have had to collude with and accept its conventional class-biased views and values. These expressed the perspective of the Religious Tract Society (RTS), an evangelical enterprise within the Church of England, which published the *GOP*. The tone adopted was one of a benevolent Christian paternalism and Charles Peters nurtured a view of himself as a firm but kindly father figure who had the advantage of being able to take an 'objective' but unambiguous view of matters. Under his paternalistic direction the *GOP* consistently sought to encourage its readers in their faith, providing them with the advice and direction which would enable them to live according to the teachings of the Church of England.

Because the *GOP* represented the religious establishment, there was no questioning its respectability. Parents, guardians and employers could safely allow the young women in their charge access to such a paper. However, to be successful it was essential that the magazine should also appeal to the intended audience. Consequently, the religious message, though intrinsic, was not allowed to dominate. Peters was keenly alert to the contradictions and pressures which faced young middle-class women in their progress towards adulthood and communicated this understanding in the paper. He knew, for instance, that it was unrealistic to simply advocate marriage and motherhood as the Christian woman's route to the fulfilment of her femininity when the number of eligible females outnumbered males: 'The stern fact is to be considered that there are considerably more spinsters in the world than bachelors' (Vol. 9, 1888, 422).

Similarly, within an economic system characterised by instability, when fortunes were won and lost at an alarming rate and inheritance could not be guaranteed, Peters knew that a life of domestic dependence was not a realistic option for some middle-class young women. 'Be the reason what it may, there is a distinct class of women who, fairly well educated, and with parents in a good position, find it necessary to work'

(Vol.16,1895, 125). The pages of the *GOP* dealt with the harsh realities of the middle-class girl's relationship with the labour market and sought to offer warnings for the unwary, practical advice for the inexperienced and encouragement for the ambitious. The paper included articles on topics such as 'Healthy Lives For Working Girls' (Vol. 8, 1886–7, 76); 'How Working Girls Live in London' (Vol. 9, 1888, 422); and 'Women's Work: Its Value and Possibilities' (Vol.16, 1895, 51). It also provided information about the type of work in which women could become engaged which included 'Women's Work in Sanitation and Hygiene' (Vol. 21, 1900–01, 21). Such articles, though already suggesting the direction of professional work for women, were in the minority. The primary focus was upon providing the means whereby girls could learn the skills necessary for independent living, should they need it. Readers living within wealthy families where women were expected to be dependent could not be insulted by the presumption that they would find it necessary to earn a living and the *GOP* could not be seen to be actively encouraging girls to break away from their family responsibilities by choosing to work for a living. It was necessary to consider options for work but always to maintain the preference for the traditional female role as financially dependent within the family.

For this purpose, voluntary social work was excellent. Such work could be undertaken from a home base, it relied upon what were considered natural female qualities and it utilised domestic skills (Vicinus, 1895). Christian Charity offered a rationale for such female activity in the public world and there was, moreover, a pressing need amongst the poor for the kind of help which it was believed only women could provide. However, the appropriate balance between domestic responsibility and its extension in the public world could only be maintained if the domestic sphere remained central. It was thus crucial to the *GOP*'s perspective that a girl who undertook social welfare work should understand that this was a supplement, not an alternative to her duties in the home. This principle is explicit and central to the social welfare narrative.

Charles Peters was steering a difficult course. He needed to recognise and maintain the centrality of domesticity in the lives of his readers whilst at the same time encouraging in them the willingness and desire to become involved in the world beyond the confines of the home. This was further complicated by the fact that middle-class girls themselves were, at the end of the nineteenth century, becoming much more interested in breaking the bonds of domestic dependence:

> *It is a sign of the times that girls are no longer content to live idle, useless lives, lives of ease and comfort simply, but one and all are desirous of being up and doing, not necessarily for means of living, but that their time and talents, God's own good gifts, may be made useful to others.* (Vol. 6, 1885, 346)

If the *GOP* was to be relevant to these active young women, it must recognise their interest in using their energies beyond the household. Besides, the general availability of servants ('an essential part of our family life' [Vol. 14, 1892, 275]) meant that many wealthy young women simply had 'not enough to do' within the home (Vol. 8, 1886–7, 664). They needed other activity not only for the sake of their dignity and good humour, but also to maintain their mental and physical health. During the course of the nineteenth century women discovered that voluntary social work offered constructive possibilities

for balancing their personal desires with the demands of home and family (Vicinus, 1985). Moreover, they could claim that their engagement was not for themselves, but for the good of others and the wider society. This was its justification. In these terms, the *GOP* had no difficulty in encouraging their participation.

However, there were dangers. Organising themselves to work with the poor alerted many social workers to the structural nature of inequality, prompting them towards a political analysis of the issues. Awareness of the needs and humiliations of poor women could sharpen the consciousness of injustice common to all women. This easily dovetailed with the growing clamour for political and social equality for women and for all workers as social welfare interventions encountered and overlapped with political ideas and organisation. For instance, women connected with the Manchester University Settlement became active political campaigners (Liddington and Norris, 1978, 77, 175; Batsleer, 2001); there is no doubt that Emmeline Pethwick's involvement in the Settlement Movement and the Girls' Club Movement lay at the roots of her activism as a suffragette (Pethwick-Lawrence, 1938) and there is evidence that the Green Lady Hostel in Littlehampton, purchased for Lily Montagu and Emmeline Pethwick as a holiday home for factory girls and women, was the backdrop of many a political discussion. For Lily Montagu, the question of working conditions for young women, trade unionism and the Girls' Club Movement were inextricably connected right from the start and continued to be so throughout her careeer (Montagu, 1904; 1941).

No educated, middle-class voluntary worker could be completely immune to the ferment of ideas which sought solutions to social problems in political organisation and mass movements.

Understandably, the possibility of middle-class girls participating in political movements was deeply disturbing for the established order, but there was little that a girls' magazine such as the *GOP* could do actively to prevent this without giving publicity to political responses to poverty and oppression. The strategy adopted was, therefore, to give no space within the pages of the magazine to discussion of politics. They were mentioned only to be peremptorily dismissed:

> *... he poured forth his feelings on political matters, inveighing against the Poor Law, the School Board, the distraint system and saying what he would do if he were in power. When we ventured to suggest that he would not mend matters if he went to the lengths he proposed, he began an argument that we were obliged to cut short both for his employer's sake and our own.* (Vol. 8, 1886–7, 206)

In the view of the *GOP*, politics were outside the sphere of femininity, outside the sphere of religion and outside the sphere of social welfare work. The principle that voluntary work was not political work was resolutely pursued through textual silence. Political discussion was squeezed out by the religious and domestic discourses given primacy by the paper. These discourses legitimated the presence of women in the public world and denied the relationship with political activity.

Maintaining a matrix of religious, domestic, and apolitical principles, the *GOP* published articles which described a wide range of social and welfare work, inviting its readers to

participate. It encouraged them to work in their own parishes or through organisations like the YWCA wherein religious rather than political analyses would be encouraged. In addition it provided opportunities for involvement through its own charitable endeavours. The creation of 'The Girls' Own Guild of Sympathy' which distributed clothing to poor people in London and the sponsorship of the Princess Louise Home which provided a sanctuary for young women and children rescued from the streets, provided opportunities for the readers to raise funds locally, to send items of plain sewing and handicrafts for the paper to use on their behalf. The sponsorship of a *GOP* branch of the YWCA in London provided a location wherein the disparate interests of girls from different classes could be physically brought together in a space which sought to reproduce domestic harmony for those who were forced to work away from home, and at the same time linked the paper into a growing network of provision across the Empire. Thus every reader could be personally involved in this great female movement for the social good: there were subjects of interest and methods of participating for even those living in the most isolated and remote part of the Empire and nobody was required to question their social role or circumstances in order to feel involved.

PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

Religion

As the fundamental principle which informed the *GOP*'s approach, religious motivation lay at the heart of its sponsorship of voluntary work with the poor. In an increasingly sceptical and secular society, social welfare work was to be construed as religious work, undertaken as an expression of faith and practised as a means of demonstrating the virtue of that faith. It was conceived as work through which Christianity might be communicated to the poor who, particularly in the metropolitan slums, were considered to be surviving in a condition of 'absolute godlessness' (Mearns, 1883).

Although the readership of the paper was primarily middle class, the religious ideology through which the *GOP* expressed its understanding included the belief that all girls had a soul which made them equal in the spiritual world and which, therefore, offered possibilities for achieving godliness in the material world:

> *Just a factory girl, you say, and you pass the toiling sister with a careless glance at the rough attire with its seedy brilliance or dowdy, flaunting hat; but do you ever think, my dear girl-readers, of the loving heart – the immortal soul, as loving, as immortal as your own – hidden beneath the unattractive covering. Only a factory girl! Wild, impudent, defiant, with little of the refined grace of her gently nurtured sister to attract or reward one's efforts, but once she is reached, well, some of the brightest jewels in the king's crown will be taken – hardly won gems – from among the factory girls.* (Vol. 16, 1895, 644)

The *GOP*, as a development from the religious tract, had initially sought to take its message to a mass market and to counter the readily available thrills available in other cheap publications. Yet there was never any real chance that its lofty message would be sought by all girls in preference to reading which was 'full of low illustrated jokes and so forth' (Vol.16, 1895, 645). It must have become increasingly apparent that as

respectable literature, the *GOP* was preaching to the converted. The evangelical intent of the publishers was, therefore, displaced onto the readers who were encouraged to make contacts across classes in the name of Christianity to act as a medium for its message. Indeed readers themselves were enjoined to become tract distributors.

The woman who went in to working-class areas to distribute religious tracts was portrayed as both missionary and embryonic social worker, alert and sympathetic to those in need and using her own networks and associations to maximise the support available. Like any outreach worker, she was often the first point of contact for working people in need of outside help and support:

> *A fine, stalwart-looking young man lamented that he had scarcely any schooling and feared that the reading we offered him might be too abstruse for him. He had taught himself to write a little by copying letters and could spell out easy sentences; but his education had ceased when he was six years old. His home was in Devonshire but his navvy work had taken him far afield. We recommended him to go to a night-school and he was well inclined to do so. We fell in with him several times afterwards, and found that he had followed our advice, and went three times a week.* (Vol. 8, 1886–7, 206)

In one encounter, a Polish man who accepted a tract was given 'a trifle' for his wife and children and 'refreshment' for himself when he admitted that he had not eaten all day. In response to the kindness, he gave his address which was passed on to a District Visitor who discovered that the family was Jewish:

> *The family were subsequently placed under the protection of a charitable Jewish lady, who said, with truth, 'That her people took such care of their own poor, that they had no need to apply to the Christian.' Still, it is well that Jew and Gentile should meet, as they do now, happily, in works of general benevolence. The reign of Christ will begin when universal love takes the place of sectarian hate, and religious persecution ceases.* (ibid, 207)

Here was a direct instruction to the reader to understand that charity should not be used as a means of winning converts, that help must be given for its own sake as a Christian act, regardless of the recipient's faith. Such clarity about the distinction between proselytising fervour and charitable support was important at a time when poor Jewish immigrants were being targeted for conversion by unscrupulous evangelical Christians, a situation which was a cause of friction in Anglo-Jewish relations (Montagu, 1901). The established church was thus suggesting at an early stage that whilst evangelicism was a route into and a contact point for charitable endeavour, social welfare work was not to be used as a bribe in the name of Christianity. Conversion to Christianity might be an ideal to be achieved through personal influence, but it was not to be the objective of a welfare intervention.

The distribution of religious tracts was a diffuse method of reaching a wide constituency of working-class and poor citizens but it offered few opportunities to work systematically with the recipients. Demonstrating the practical value of Christianity required a more focused approach wherein the worker could develop a relationship and use her personal influence to support the message of the tract. Here the idea of 'visiting' became

significant and the distribution of religious reading material began to merge directly and overlap with methods of relief work.

A fairly straightforward way of making contact with a captive audience of working-class people was to gain the permission of an employer to visit the workplace. In his contribution entitled *Factory Girls at Work and Play*, Lloyd Lester described how a young middle-class woman regularly visited a brush factory in the suburbs of London 'to do good to her sisters, who, alas, are so hard to reach and lift up to better ways of life' (Vol.16, 1895, 644). The framework within which good was done was that of the religious service and the distribution of 'tiny booklets'. There was no pretence of any motivation other than the religious and again, no bribery. The character of the young woman involved in factory visiting was understood as central to the success of the venture and her femininity was used to emphasise the power of religious belief in this character:

> *She is one of those sweet Christian women who give up their lives to honour their Master by ministering to the neglected and neglectful denizens of our working centres of population. As I looked at her slender form and gentle face I marvelled at the courage with which this frail little creature would go into the roughest and most uncompromising places ...* (ibid, 645)
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> *When she first went among ... the rough women and rougher men, among whom were infidels and free thinkers, would never permit any work of a religious character to continue long. Miss R-, however, although of frail physique, has the courage of – I was going to write a lion, but more truly the bravery of a fearless servant of God. She determined to persevere. At first a great amount of annoyance rewarded her efforts, some of the women and the men would strike up a noisy or ribald song to drown hers, but patience won its way until the most irreverent grew quiet. Now those very men almost always join in the singing, their voices forming a pleasant bass accompaniment to the women's shriller tones in any well known hymn ...* (ibid, 645–6)

Once the Christian foundation of the factory visitor's work was accepted and her personal motivations respected, she then had a firm base from which to create friendships with individual workers. In this process of acceptance, her 'frail' femininity was an important feature. It was the patience intrinsic to this femininity which ultimately enabled her to win through. Having won the respect of the factory workers, the visitor could then move onto another stage of contact, home visiting. Visiting the poor at home offered opportunities to provide personal care and attention, again of a type which privileged femininity and domestic skill. Implicitly, no man would have been able to offer personal care and attention to a sick female factory worker in her bedroom. Winning and creating personal relationships and friendships provided the basis upon which the factory visitor could exert influence to encourage workers to attend a club or an evening class whereby they might seek to better themselves. Such facilities were organised directly in opposition to the music halls and gin palaces, or 'the gaily decked bars' where the factory girls might otherwise have spent their leisure.

In Lester's article, no information was offered about the nature of the educational class from which one of the factory girls tried to excuse herself because she liked to be 'out-

door now the evenings are coming bright' (ibid, 645). However, elsewhere the *GOP* recognised the difficulties of organising classes and clubs focused totally on religion. When one character attempted to organise a club in her neighbourhood, she met problems in persuading people that it would work:

> *... the really bad set of girls liked their liberty too much to consent to come regularly to a meeting or anything of the sort. She next appealed to a Bible woman, but met with the same discouragement. She had tried it herself, the good woman said. A lady had started a Bible-class in her room for them, but after one or two attempts it had dwindled to nothing.* (Vol. 2, 1880–81, 564)

Except for the Sunday School (Vol. 1,1880: 282; Vol. XIV 1892; 803) which was attended by those already wedded to Christian principles, the club or the class organised by middle-class women for girls would seldom be successful if it offered nothing other than religious fare. The only possibility of attracting members was to provide a chance for girls to relax after work, to have fun, enjoy themselves and to learn skills which would help them in their anticipated future roles as wives and mothers. Religious concern for the welfare of others would provide the zeal necessary to set up such a club, but within the club religion could only be offered in small doses in the wake of other activities. Nevertheless, the tract, the prayer and the religious lesson were always to be included in the programme:

> *As soon as all were seated again Florrie pinned up before them a large coloured picture of some Bible subject, and gave a short Scripture lesson. It was very simple, very practical, and never exceeded ten minutes.* (ibid, Vol. 2, 1880–81, 564)

Clubs and classes offered constructive alternatives to the streets or less respectable entertainment but such interventions, though included in the *GOP*'s definition of social work, were presented as difficult and not to be undertaken by those easily discouraged. In the context of work which involved association and groups, the magazine emphasised the leadership role of the worker. In doing so, it mobilised class difference rather than gender identification. At the same time it suggested that whilst religion must be present, it could be de-centred as a means of ensuring successful communication.

The tension between class difference and gender similarity, between material and spiritual welfare, was constantly present in the *GOP*'s representation of social welfare work. Resolution of the tension was achieved through the emphasis placed upon the relationship between femininity and the spiritual quest. The maternal and domestic role was held to be God-given and women might achieve cross-class friendship through their recognition of the commonality of role and soul. Because of her greater opportunities for education, the middle-class young woman was in a much better position to understand this than her poorer sister. It was, therefore, her responsibility to seek to share her privileges through the development of cross-class friendship and it was through such friendship that poor women were to be helped. Although the provision of material help might be part of the relationship, this was not the purpose of the contact. The purpose was rather to help working-class women to help themselves and their families through the development of domestic skill. For such purposes home visiting was considered to be the most productive intervention. It was within the sphere of the home that the *GOP* demonstrated that the qualities and skills of the administering Christian lady were matchless.

Domesticity

Within the *GOP*, home was portrayed as the place where the woman was most truly 'herself'. As such it was used as a metaphor for the condition of womanhood in general. Those women who had no home or whose home was so degraded that they preferred the streets, were not only the women in greatest danger of losing all that made them female but were also the women who were then unable to create the type of family life which would make respectable citizens of all its members. Whilst the condition of rural housing for the poor was in reality no better than that of the urban poor, it was the condition of housing in the cities which concerned the *GOP*. Poor housing and poverty in the city not only encouraged young women to seek work in industry, outside the domestic sphere, but also encouraged them to spend their leisure time beyond domestic walls:

> *Miss R- had a call to make here, so we entered the cottage. Such a place, whose walls, once white, perhaps, were now a dingy mud colour variegated with grease marks.*
>
> *The floor was bare and crusted with dirt. In a cradle at one side of the room was a baby asleep, with a shaggy dog at its feet keeping guard, the whole array looking like they had just come back from a visit to the chimney sweep. In another corner of the room stood a rabbit-hutch; over the door hopped some pigeons, pecking at a bundle of dirty linen lying beside a tub of soap-suds. The father of the family sat smoking a foul pipe, while his wife, unkempt and dirty like her surroundings, stood frying herrings for a meal ...*
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> *... I want to make clear how very little hold the magic word 'home' has upon working girls of this class, which accounts for the love of street life which characterises the majority.* (Vol. 16, 1895, 646)

It was in relation to those who lived in such inadequate homes that those involved in the *GOP* thought that middle-class women might really make a difference. This might be achieved simply by visiting and offering spiritual comfort and practical domestic help especially in relation to the sick, the old and the infirm.

> *Miss R- made Louie more comfortable, let some fresh air into the stifling room, and having fed her with a little dainty she had brought, proceeded to talk in her gentle way to the sick girl of 'the city that hath no need of the sun,' whither Louie was evidently going, for in that neglected factory girl's heart the seed of the heavenly sower had fallen on good ground and was now bearing fruit to eternal life.* (ibid)

Working-class women and girls were not blamed by the magazine for the conditions in which they lived but these conditions were considered dangerous to national health and stability:

> *To us women and girls is allotted the rule and government of the homes of the land ... If we keep these homes of ours pure, refined and virtuous, we wage war against decay, and occupy the proud place of helping to build up the country, and strengthen the hands of the State. Loving, moral and religious must be the character of the women and girls of a country if the homes over which they preside are to be pure, restful, attractive and refined. Wherever the homes of the land fall below this*

standard, statistics prove that the strength, life and progress of that country is sapped, notwithstanding its armies, its laws and its institutions. (Vol. 6, 1885, 198)

It was argued that working-class young women preferred not to be in their homes because the homes were so bad. Consequently the level of domestic skill and commitment was declining. The responsibility of the middle-class female social worker was to help reverse this trend, and it was work of national importance. If Christianity gave shape to the meaning of social welfare work, it was the demonstration of the virtues of a domesticity which provided the practical focus for the type of intervention favoured by the *GOP*. The *GOP* persistently maintained that the best type of work for a poor girl was domestic service. Within this, a girl could learn the arts of housewifery whilst at the same time living under the protection of her employer. Thoughtfully, the magazine instructed its readers about the appropriate treatment of 'Our friends the servants' (Vol. XIV, 1892, 275). However, the reality was that most working-class girls preferred the freedoms of factory work to the restrictions of domestic service:

They are, many of them, quite honest, respectable lasses, but from their infancy no other prospect suggests itself but 'going to the factory' when old enough to earn their livelihood. Domestic service, I regret to say, is not a popular institution with the Silvertown girls. Here and there a wise mother may be found who prefers to send her daughters to situations of service in gentlemen's families, but it is quite exceptional. (Vol. 16,1895, 596)

If the girls of the poor would not willingly put themselves under the tutelage of middle-class women through domestic service, then possibly the only way in which they could be reached was through an appeal to their essential feminine aspirations: 'There are grand possibilities in these factory girls, if only skilful hands and loving Christ-like souls will do their part to elevate and refine their natures for higher things' (ibid). In this enterprise, it was essential that every individual in the army of middle-class female philanthropists should herself be an example of the type of woman she was attempting to create in the slums. Bringing Christian understanding and domestic pride into poor homes required of the social worker that she herself be entirely convinced of the value of religion and domesticity to women as individuals and through them, to society as a whole. Thus the readers of the *GOP* were exhorted to consider social welfare work only within a framework which prioritised their own domestic role.

There was no ambiguity about the central role of women in the text. Readers were never allowed to doubt that their primary responsibility was to their own families:

Mrs Mayhew was delighted that her daughters should begin to take an interest in their poorer neighbours and was always ready to help them in any benevolent plan they took up; but at the same time she was exceedingly anxious that they should not become so absorbed in their new occupations as to neglect their own family, and especially their brothers. She knew how many young men have been driven to finding their pleasures away from home because nothing has been done to make home attractive to them. (Vol. 6, 1885, 150)

All other activity was to be founded upon this priority and no activity in the public world was to be condoned unless it related back to this. The middle-class family, and the

woman's place in the home, was sacrosanct to the *GOP*. There was no contradiction between what middle-class girls were being asked to impart to working-class girls and the values which ruled their own lives.

Maintaining this rule, the *GOP* emphasised the importance of the home base. The pages of the magazine regularly contained practical instructions relating to a domestic art, in particular needlework, and periodically, it would make appeals for plain sewn items of clothing and various articles of handiwork to be donated to help with bazaars to raise funds for the GOP's own sponsored welfare activities, or to distribute directly among the deserving poor. It would then acknowledge the donors:

> *The members of the Hampton Court Palace Association for the Aid of Friendless Girls sent them 20 useful garments at Christmas, and their constant allies, the pupils of the South Hampstead High School for Girls, presented them with 100 articles of clothing at the same period. The latter comprised dresses, petticoats, aprons, and what not, and when despatched there were still 19 more dresses on hand. We congratulate the girls of this High School on being able to employ their fingers so usefully, and would venture to compliment its principal and teachers on their part in the good work.* (Vol. 6, 1885, 442)

In 1892, an article by HRH Princess Mary Adelaide, Duchess of Teck entitled *Girls as Needleworkers for the Poor* described objectives of the London Needlework Guild which organised middle-class women to make items of clothing for the poor of the city, primarily in terms of its benefits for the needleworkers:

> *Its objects are two: first benefit* ***to workers****; second, benefit* ***from work****. I am not sure whether the first is not the more important of the two benefits. We express it as 'encouraging useful work, and giving an object to all'. We all own that work is dreary that has no object; the guild gives you one; you work with the happy certainty that your work goes where it is most wanted; the more you work, the more it will interest you. Seven years' experience shows this, not only in the increased amount sent by individuals, but in increased excellence of everything: patience, perseverence, industry, sympathy, are all encouraged by the Guild. May we not, then, call it a benefit to workers?* (Vol. XIV, 1892, 133, emphasis in original)

Thus the virtue of domestic skill was emphasised through the medium of charitable endeavour. Social welfare work was effected through a continuum from the private, home-based contributor to the public institutionally-based worker but the home was the foundation for all.

At one end of the continuum, no reader of the *GOP* need feel excluded from the possibility of participating in the fashion for social work because she was totally home or school-based. Indeed involvement in the opportunities provided by the *GOP* itself was presented as a duty and one which ultimately could only benefit the reader herself. At the other end of the continuum was the persistent image of the courageous woman sacrificing all to live and work amongst the poor. A very short article in 1895 criticised the work of district visitors as work which often could only be 'half done' because the woman visitor's time was more fully absorbed by 'home duties and the claims of society'. This anonymously written article ends with the plea:

> *Come and live among them. Give up all for their sakes, nay, for Christ's sake. It is deeds they want, not words; the life lived, not vaguely talked of ... Christ himself lived in this way. He went among them, lived with them. His whole time was given to them. His work was with them, and His leisure was also with them. They were His joy as well as His work.* (Vol. 16, 1895, 589)

However, such an exhortation is an exception. Its reference point could have been either the religious orders which since the middle of the century had attracted single women from the middle classes or the settlements which were becoming an increasingly influential presence in the city. Neither are mentioned by name here or anywhere else in the magazine which suggests some ambivalence about such organisations on the part of the *GOP*. The paper generally demonstrated antipathy to the idea of girls leaving home and it was at pains to represent its version of female philanthropy if not entirely within the home at least within the neighbourhood of the reader. In so doing it could situate social welfare initiatives in the rural as well as the urban context, within the West as well as the East End of the metropolis and thus counter the superficial fashionable activity of 'slumming'.

The series which most directly conveys the *GOP*'s position is entitled 'Stay-at-Home Girls' which appeared in 1885–6. Here the narrative is played out around the classic Victorian heroine, a girl on the verge of adulthood confined to the home as a consequence of some unspecified disability or hysterical illness (Kahane, 1995). In this case the indisposition was caused by an unspecified accident. Around Jeannette Mayhew's invalid couch, social and philanthropic activities are discussed, step-by-step instructions for action given, and issues of concern debated. From the Mayhew home, linked directly to the local vicar's wife and a neighbouring aristocratic woman, a wide range of initiatives are devised for the rural neighbourhood. These include a club for local teenage boys, a penny bank, a bazaar for showing and selling the handiwork of local working people, a YWCA branch, a Band of Hope and a 'Fresh Air Home' where children of a city slum are provided with a country holiday. Within the text, a secondary narrative of family life is pursued which emphasises the virtues of the ordinary middle-class household whence all these initiatives derived:

> *Mr Morton's eyes and thoughts wandered around the room from Ronald and Elsie, who were softly, but diligently, practising a difficult passage in a duet between violin and piano, to Mrs Mayhew and Miss Massingham, who were earnestly discussing some new benevolent project – Mrs Mayhew emphasising her words with expressive flourishes of her knitting needle and Miss Massingham eagerly agreeing. From them his glance passed to Mr Mayhew, tracing out a difficult geological problem, with coloured maps and portentous reports; but it dwelt longest on the sofa where Jeanette lay, her fingers busy with soft, warm knitting, while she merrily joined Mr Lethbridge in teasing Nannie about her last pet, a miserable little dog which she had rescued from its tormentors and brought home.* (Vol. 6, 1885, 150)

Within this idealised Victorian home pictured at leisure, the two most active proponents of charitable work, Jeanette and her mother, are both shown knitting. This simple activity, here representing domestic harmony, was used in an unrelated article to signify disharmony when the girl Lily knits 'busily' whilst expressing her dissatisfaction with the

limits of the duties involved in caring for her brother in his London home. Demanding that he take the woman's role of winding the wool whilst she held the skein, Lily is metaphorically shown to be challenging gender boundaries in her desire to work in the East End (Vol. 8, 1886–7, 664).

Through the stories contrived around the Mayhew family, the *GOP* centres the rural neighbourhood and emphasises the interconnectedness of town and country with reference to the men of the family who commute to the city and who rely upon the women at home to maintain their stability and comfort. The story of the 'Fresh Air Homes' reinforces the point. In this tale, Jeanette Mayhew is envious of a friend 'who was a daughter of a clergyman in one of the densely crowded parishes of south-east London'. Living in the city enabled that young woman to undertake 'interesting work ... amongst her father's parishioners'. The difficulty is resolved through the provision of Fresh Air Homes in Jeanette's neighbourhood. These provide work for respectable working-class women in the locality, an opportunity for poor children to benefit from the health-giving qualities of the countryside and a chance for Jeanette and her sisters to contribute to city work without leaving home.

In Lily's story, on the other hand, the possibilities for work amongst the poor in the West End of the city are emphasised. Her brother Alfred meets her desire to work in the East End by taking her into the back lanes and courts of her local neighbourhood, visiting an old disabled cabman who indicates that there are families nearby who would benefit from her helping hand. After the visit, during which her brother has to defend her when the cabman suggests that she might not have the necessary domestic skills to be really helpful (p665), Alfred sets out his case against his sister working in the East End:

> *'First, then, though you are fairly strong, I don't consider you robust enough to stand the fatigue of the journey and the work for any length of time, and in all weathers; and such things begun and not carried out, or done by fits and starts, are of less real use than a smaller work nearer home, steadily persisted in. Secondly, I have an idea – you must take it for what it's worth – that for everyone a short apprenticeship in one's own neighbourhood is a test as to whether the romance or fashion of the thing has an undue weight with us; mind, I say undue. Even* ***such*** *an impetus is useful in measure, in arousing some to whom the notion of practical, personal work is new. Thirdly – Oh! No, that is one of the things best left unsaid.'*
>
> *'Go on, Alf. You* ***shall*** *tell me all.'*
>
> *'No, it sounds so horribly selfish. Well then, if you will have it, how can I tell but that after a month or two you would feel it your duty, like one of your heroines, to take up your abode in the midst of "your people", and, though this would bear out one of my notions, what a forlorn, desolate room this would be again, when my bit of sunshine had vanished.'* (Vol. 8, 1886–7, 664, emphasis in the original).

Of course, Lily chooses to work in the local neigbourhood and in so doing demonstrates that she is able to use her domestic skills to help and aid poor respectable households, her welcome being facilitated by the recognition that she 'Looks upon all as the children of the same Father, upon all alike as needing the same redeeming love' (ibid).

Domesticity and religious sentiment not only provide a service to the poor, but they are able to still Lily's frustrations with her lot and maintain her brother's happiness.

THE APOLITICAL PRINCIPLE

The belief that women interested in social work should prioritise their own homes and seek to work in their own neighbourhoods transposed the role which the pre-industrial gentlewoman in the countryside had exercised in respect of servants and farm workers onto the developing urban and industrial landscape of the nineteenth century. In this sense, the relationship was representative of the social and political organisation of a previous age and it was entirely conservative.

However, because social relationships were so much more complex in the urban setting, and because the classes had become so remote from each other both physically and socially, the woman of superior class could not assume that she had a right of entry or that she would automatically receive a welcome in the homes of the workers. It was necessary that she should win the trust of individuals by demonstrating her personal goodwill in order that she might gain access to their homes and hearts. The notion of cross-class friendship was not self-consciously conceived as a political counterpoint to socialist ideas, but nevertheless it offered an alternative interpretation and a solution founded upon class harmony rather than class conflict. In the atmosphere of the 1880s and 1890s this was important as the middle classes struggled to deal with the new phenomenon of the industrial organisation of the poorest unskilled and casual workers (Jones, 1971). Nowhere does the magazine acknowledge the relationship between club and settlement work and trade unionism (Reason, 1898) though it does make a short reference to the formation of 'a Woman's Council for London, the object of which is to consider the whole question of women's work and to ascertain by systematic inquiry how far legislation may be successfully applied to such grievances as may be disclosed' (Vol. 16, 1895, 256).

The presence of the idea of friendship in the vision of social welfare work offered by the *GOP* obscured the almost complete absence of the political discourse within the magazine. Acknowledgment of the conditions under which working-class girls and women produced the goods consumed by middle-class ladies did not lead to any questioning of economic relationships; instead, using the vehicle of friendship and common female interest, the paper asked its readers to take responsibility as individuals for the demands which they made on workers:

> *Some twenty or more followed me upstairs quite unconscious that I was 'the lady' whose address they were supposed to have come to hear. This gave me a grand opportunity of having a friendly talk with them. They spoke without any reserve ... 'Ah, dear' said one of the saddest-looking of my friends to me, putting her arm around my waist, and giving me a hearty kiss (which I greatly enjoyed, and felt grateful to her for giving) – 'ah, dear, if only ladies would give us time, our life would be far less of a drudgery. How many ladies never take the poor dressmaker into consideration when they give their order for a dress to be made! They leave it all until the last moment, and then they are in such a dreadful hurry that poor we have to suffer.* ***If they would***

> ***but think that we, too, had our lives to live'.*** (Vol.1,1880, 574–5, emphasis in original)

Although the relations of labour and consumption were not questioned by the *GOP*, there were sometimes criticisms made of employers who were felt to make excessive and injurous demands upon their employees:

> *All the railway officials are overworked, she [the bar worker] amongst them; and, in addition, those of the Metropolitan Railway have to breathe an atmosphere of sulphorous smoke highly prejudicial to health.*
>
> *We find more than one of our new friends suffering from throat and chest complaints, owing to exposure to the draughts that pour through the ever-open window and door behind which they stand.* (Vol. 6, 1885, 280)

The solution to the problems described was not to organise the railway bar workers to campaign against such conditions, but to visit them at their work, to invite them to religious meetings and classes, to organise a YWCA especially for their benefit and comfort, to provide a missionary institute for their use and to pursue the case for temperance. Criticism is of the anonymous corporate employer, and to balance it Anne Beale, the author, promotes the philanthropic activity of wealthy individuals:

> *It may be permitted us to mention here that those devoted friends of unprotected girls, Lord and Lady Brabazon, have lent their dining room on Sunday afternoons for a Bible class for these and other employees, and given tea to all who take advantage of their kind invitation.* (ibid).

Whilst the *GOP* considered the working conditions of many girls and women to be in need of reform, there is no suggestion that this could be the purpose for the involvement of its readers. They needed information about conditions in order to more effectively organise their own interventions, but these were to respond to the needs which arose as a consequence of work, not to interfere in the relations between employer and employee and certainly not to provoke those with whom they worked into making political demands.

If there was a silence around the possibility of trade union organisation and related social welfare work, it was as nothing compared to the silence which surrounded the question of women's suffrage. There was an element in the paper which recognised and applauded the gains which women had achieved as a result of the efforts of outstanding women such as Cady Stanton (Vol. 16, 1895, 15), and there was something of a presumption that women could achieve much in the world if they set their minds to it, but this was never connected with formal politics. If there was feminism in the paper, it was a feminism which informed women that it was their responsibility to develop themselves but only for unselfish motives. Formal politics were held to be outside of the female sphere. Thus social welfare work was understood as quintessentially 'social'; by definition this was not political. Moreover, the social world of women was conceived as personal and private, even when it was located in the public world. The social worker was required to sustain that personal and private world for women in her own life and in the lives of those with whom she worked. Social work was intended to tip the balance towards the consolidation of the domestic, not further in the direction of the public.

CONCLUSION

Within the public sphere the woman was portrayed by the *GOP* as an individual. She might collaborate with others in order to achieve a commonly agreed end, such as organising a bazaar to raise funds for a pet cause; she might associate with others in friendship; and she might communicate across class, race and gender boundaries as an aspect of her voluntary work, but except in relation to her family, she was never addressed as a member of any group by the *GOP*. The belief in an essential femininity enabled the magazine's writers to accept the generality of their case whilst at the same time adopting a writing style which was personal in tone, drawing each reader into an intimate dialogue with the text. In this way, the individual character of each girl was inextricably bound to a set of values which located her absolutely in the religious and social order of the day. It was this set of values which drew the boundaries around the possibilities of social welfare work for girls and women and within which they were required to strive to achieve fulfilment of their highest purposes as women. In this the expectations of girls as voluntary workers were one and the same as the expectations of girls in life. Their main purpose and role in life was to care for others and to put their own needs and desires aside when these obstructed their opportunities to care. The life of a virtuous woman seeking fulfilment of her destiny was meant to be one of self-sacrifice: 'youth and health, intellect and leisure, money and position, are talents entrusted to us by God, to be used, not for our pleasure, but in His service' (Vol. 8, 1886–7, 506) and it was towards such ends that she was educated:

> *By education, I mean the cultivation of the head, the heart, and the hand, so as to enable us to diffuse knowledge, provident habits, morality, piety, and happiness among those with whom we associate. In short, I mean the full and healthy use of all the faculties God has bestowed on us.* (Vol. 6, 1885, 198)

Social welfare work offered an excellent opportunity for self-sacrifice and the suppression of ego especially for the unmarried woman who might otherwise lack purpose or restraint in her life. The best sort of work entailed such sacrifice:

> *Sometimes a daydream is turned into sweet reality! Involving as it did so much of what would be lovely and good for others, and something of sacrifice for ourselves, we felt our daydream must become a tangible, real thing.* (Vol. 27,1906, 823)

Social welfare work required personal commitment in order to withstand the many obstacles and difficulties which it presented:

> *The motto of all true work and of the only real work among the poor is summed up in the words of this sentence. 'I have learned that it is of no use to try to help people unless we give ourselves to them'.* (Vol. 16, 1895, 589)

There was truth in the representation of social welfare work as difficult and there would indeed have been little to gain for anyone had a young woman decided to offer her services on a whim or as a response to current fashion. The *GOP* was naturally keen to dissuade girls from participating as a response to inappropriate motivation and the notion of self-sacrifice was, therefore, a useful mechanism for recruiting only the most suitable candidates for the work. It demanded that young women:

> *... should look carefully to their motives, examine themselves faithfully and frequently*

> *as to the object of their labours, not be weary in well-doing, discriminate between duties and duties, and finally, avoid attempting too much.* (Vol. 8 1886–7, 508)

High standards were required of the individual girl who wished to engage in socially useful work. The public world for women was not for the faint-hearted and social welfare activity would soon betray any weakness of character. The work is never presented as easy, but always as challenging, although much satisfaction was to be gleaned for those whose purposes were selfless, who had the consistency and strength to overcome disappointments and who were sufficiently organised to pursue it as a complement to domestic duties.

For the *GOP*, social welfare work was an appropriate activity for girls and young women which offered them opportunities to test their mettle in the public world without undermining the traditional female domestic role. The focus of the paper was almost entirely upon the female readership. There was little interest in addressing social questions except insofar as these might be the means whereby the readers could develop their feminine characteristics and extend their opportunities to become good Christian subjects of the crown. The ostensible purpose of social welfare interventions was to 'do good' to the poor, bringing them religion, friendship, domestic education, schemes for self-improvement and respectable recreational and leisure activities. However, the underlying purpose was to manage the femininity of middle-class girls, to help facilitate their entry into the public world without undermining traditional gender roles. Managing the tensions and contradictions involved was the responsibility of the individual girl, but the paper was there to offer advice and information, to help and support the girl in her endeavours and to ensure that she understood the terms within which she must proceed.

The success of social work as an occupation for women is evidence that individual young women did succeed in managing the tensions between their public and private lives. However, this success was founded upon a dominant notion of social work which was inherently conservative in terms of its principles and purposes. So although women were involved in the whole range of welfare, philanthropic and educational interventions at the end of the nineteenth century, and this is reflected in the pages of the *GOP*, the ideological constraints within which they worked meant that in the attempt to manage their situation, they were pushed towards identification with forms of work which reflected and reinforced their femininity and domesticity. Family-based interventions with women and children and work which supported individuals through troubled times was the most easily managed. These eventually became the dominant models of women's work even when religion ceased to be the main motivation for engagement. However, ideas about vocation grounded within religious principles lay behind such work even when it was secularised and professionalised.

It could not be argued that the *Girls' Own Paper* was the dominant force in shaping the relationship between femininity and social work in its earliest phases. However, it was influential in setting out the possibilities and limits of respectable activity for women. The benevolent paternalism of Charles Peters steered the paper through a period of great changes in the lives and expectations of middle-class women and social welfare work was mobilised as a fitting vehicle for managing and containing these changes.

By the time of Peters' death in 1908, the fashion for social work in the poorest areas of cities had passed its peak. The new editor, Flora Flickman, was keen to maintain the principles which Peters had established but less keen to recommend social work as an entrée into public life. Increasingly it was becoming apparent that there was a role for the state in providing social services and that training and wages would lead to a different standard of service and commitment. The voluntary social worker did not disappear, but the attraction was diminishing by the end of the Edwardian period. By 1910, in an article entitled *Unemployment Among Wealthy Women*, bored readers are being exhorted to be more thorough in their housekeeping, without reference to any outside interest (Vol. 31, 1910, 482). Fewer articles about working with the poor appear and increased attention is given to the individual development of the middle-class young women within their own milieu. To some extent this reflected a changing readership for the magazine which increasingly addressed itself to an older group, particularly young married women. On succeeding Peters, Flickman immediately changed the name of the magazine to *The Girls' Own Paper and Woman's Magazine* and it became a monthly rather than a weekly publication (Vol. 30, 1908, 2). This was but the first of a series of changes which beset the magazine over subsequent years. It was to survive under various titles, reverting back to a girls' magazine in the inter-war years, until 1956 when the magazine *Heiress*, into which it had been absorbed in 1950, ceased publication (Tinkler, 1995, 46, 51). Throughout these changes it remained unashamedly a magazine for the middle classes, representing and reflecting a middle-class view of the world. As wealthy middle-class women gained a foothold in higher education and the professions, no longer was it necessary for them to consider social work as a stage in accessing public life. Never again did the *GOP* cover voluntary social work as it had done during that period at the close of the Victorian age when to be a social worker was to lay claim to the possibility of an independent existence for women of this class.

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